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van Hell, A.C.

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SCENE 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The popularity of the field of film and religion/theology³ is ever growing. The religious aspects of film have been widely discussed, especially in religious studies and biblical theology.⁴ In recent years, film has penetrated the discipline of practical theology as well.⁵ In correspondence with the focus on 'lived religion' within practical theology, the nature of research in the field of film and practical theology is mostly empirical and focused on the religious functions film can perform, both for religious and non-religious people.⁶

This study is a multidisciplinary work in the field of film audience studies and practical theology and is conducted from a narrative framework.⁷ Through an empirical, qualitative study with thirty orthodox Protestant film viewers⁸, the relationship between the appropriation of meaning and religious identity is investigated. The aim of the research is to describe the complex relationship between watching films and meaning-making practices, especially processes regarding religious identity. It sheds new light on cultural habits of Dutch orthodox Protestants, especially regarding media consumption and the changing relationship between believers, churches and theology.

The ecclesial and denominational landscape of the Netherlands is varied and changing rapidly. Of all the Western countries, the secularisation and de-institutionalisation occurred most quickly in the Netherlands. That does not mean

³ Since film is popular with both religious studies scholars and theologians, there is some debate on using the term film and religion or film and theology (cf. Melanie Jane Wright, *Religion and Film. An Introduction* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007). Since this study is positioned within the discipline of practical theology, we prefer the term 'film and theology' but this is not used consistently. In most cases where this term is used, one can also read film and religion. For more on this debate, see 1.6.

⁴ For a quick overview see Jolyon Mitchell, "Theology and Film" in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, ed. David F. Ford with Rachel Muers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 736-59 or Robert K. Johnston (ed.), *Reframing Theology and Film. New Focus for an Emerging Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

⁵ See for example Wilhelm Gräb & Jörg Herrmann, *"Irgendwie fühl Ich mich wie Frodo..!" Eine empirische Studie zum Phänomen der Medienreligion* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006) or Clive Marsh, *Cinema and Sentiment: Film's Challenge to Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005). For more examples, see chapter 2.

⁶ We will discuss the most important studies in the historical overview in chapter 2.

⁷ The present study combines insights from several disciplines, but its main focus is a practical theological research on the appropriation of meaning in Christian film viewers. For more on the multi- and intradisciplinary character, see 1.9.3.

⁸ The term orthodox can be used in many different ways, ranging from Eastern or Russian Orthodox as different denomination in Protestantism to a synonym for 'conservative' (the meaning in which it is used here). For more on this topic, see 1.4.1.

that religion and faith have lost their relevance.⁹ In 2012, sociologist Gabriel van den Brink edited a volume in which the paradoxical meaning of spirituality in the Netherlands was discussed.¹⁰ In a highly secularised society the holy, or 'the higher, the transcendent' as it is called in the volume of Van den Brink, is still present, but not often recognised. The holy is not equated with God per se, but can take on all sorts of shapes and may be found in a local movie theatre as well as in a church. Van den Brink describes two historical developments when it comes to the transcendent: a horizontal movement from local to global transcendence and a vertical movement from the sacred to the social and the vital.¹¹ The transcendent did not disappear from the stage, but it took on a new role. God is disguised in moral practice or bodily pleasure. But not for everyone; a recent sociological publication on religion in the Netherlands shows that 24 percent of the population considers themselves to be theist.¹²

Nowadays, this faith in a god is an individual choice rather than automatic socialisation. Even for that part of the Dutch population that refers to itself as 'orthodox Christian', the content and form of that faith are changing. They have to be formed in a personal, individual way on the basis of sources that are not automatically handed to the believer by the church. For those outside the church, one such source is formed by film, as is indicated by previous research.¹³ The subject of this study is the way in which film performs a religious function for orthodox Protestant believers as well and the relation with their religious identity.

1.2 Relevance of the study

This study is relevant for practical theology because it provides an answer to the development that (popular) culture — in this case film watching — and church life are no longer two separate entities but have become closely related.¹⁴ Until recently, watching films and television was problematic in orthodox Protestant circles. That has changed considerably, but often the habit of film watching is still surrounded with suspicion.¹⁵

⁹ Joep de Hart, *Geloven Binnen En Buiten Verband*, vol. 10, SCP-Publicatie 2014 (Den Haag: Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2014).

¹⁰ Gabriël van den Brink (ed.), *De Lage Landen en het hogere: de betekenis van geestelijke beginselen in het moderne bestaan* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Joep de Hart, *Zwevende gelovigen oude religie en nieuwe spiritualiteit* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2013). See also the already mentioned Van den Brink, *De Lage Landen*.

¹³ Most notably Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See for example Reinier Sonneveld, "Film is de achtbaan,"

<http://www.blikoponeindig.nl/artikelen/bezinning-op-film/605-film-is-de-achtbaan.html>

As watching films is becoming more popular among orthodox Christians, it is worthwhile to understand how they relate these films to their religious identity and religious attitudes. This may help to understand how Christian believers negotiate between their different roles in life, society and church. As a consequence, churches may be able to assist in handling this changing environment.

Since this is an audience reception study, there is a relevance for the discipline of film studies as well. It is still largely unknown how viewers construct the meaning of a film and how they appropriate this meaning – or in other words: what people are actually doing when they watch films.¹⁶

1.3 Research questions

The main research question in this study is: *How do orthodox Protestant film viewers in the Netherlands appropriate the meaning of narrative films and what is the relationship between this appropriation and their religious identity?*

In order to answer this main research question, the following sub questions will be answered:

1. How do orthodox Protestant film viewers construct their religious identity?
2. How do orthodox Protestant film viewers appropriate the meaning of narrative films?
3. What is the relationship between this appropriation and their religious identity?

The theoretical question on meaning construction and its relationship with religious identity, leads to the question of practical relevance. Can film actually be valuable within the field of practical theology, and if so, how? What can we say about the theological implications? Therefore, a fourth research question is added:

4. What are the implications of this relationship for practical theology and religious education?

(accessed December 28, 2012); Martijn den Hollander, "Vermaak of verzoening. Reformatorische jongeren, films en de spanning tussen wereldmijding en wereldgelijkvormigheid," Master's Thesis for the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam; or "Inzicht in kijkgedrag," Reformatorisch Dagblad, December 4, 2006, http://www.refdag.nl/inzicht_in_het_kijkgedrag_1_196884 (accessed December 28, 2012).

¹⁶ Cf. Clive Marsh, "On Dealing with What Films Actually Do to People: The Practice and Theory of Film-Watching in Theology/religion and Film Discussion," in *Re-Framing Theology and Film*, ed. Robert Johnston.

1.4 Keywords

The main research question contains several key concepts that can be understood in many different ways: orthodox Protestant film viewers, appropriation, narrative films and religious identity. In this section we will discuss, define and, if appropriate, operationalise these concepts before exploring the details in later chapters.

1.4.1 Orthodox Protestant film viewers

The subjects of this study are *orthodox Protestant film viewers*. In the literature on film and theology, this is a blank page. Most research on film and theology has its focus on the common viewer, who is not necessarily religious but often uses film for meaning-making purposes. This group of orthodox Protestant viewers in the Netherlands has recently discovered the value of film and presents its own interesting characteristics and research possibilities.¹⁷

The definition of 'orthodox' requires some explanation. It is used here not to define a denomination, such as Russian Orthodox, but to refer to the level of orthodoxy – the level in which one adheres to Christian doctrines such as the infallibility of the Bible. The religious landscape in the Netherlands is rather complex and in some cases, the division between 'orthodox' and 'liberal' runs within the borders of a particular denomination.¹⁸ Within the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, for example, there is substantial variation between very liberal churches and orthodox Protestant congregations. It would not be sensible to draw lines only within certain denominations, or to define orthodoxy only along the lines of denominations. Some define it as a particular brand of Christianity that "considers the Bible to be the (infallible) Word of God with exclusive, absolute and universal authority."¹⁹ This stress on the authority of the Bible is found in other definitions as well and has close links with what in the Anglo-Saxon world would be considered 'evangelical'. However, in the context of the Netherlands, evangelical is a particular form of orthodox Protestant Christianity that is more charismatic and

¹⁷ More on this in chapter 2.

¹⁸ For statistical information on the Dutch context see J.W. Becker, J. de Hart, J. Mens, *Secularisatie en alternatieve zingeving in Nederland*, Sociale en culturele studies 24, (Rijswijk: Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 1997); for information regarding orthodox Protestant churches and the evangelical movements, see Pieter Boersema, "The evangelical Movement in the Netherlands. New wine in new wineskins?" in *The Dutch and their Gods. Secularization and Transformation of Religion in the Netherlands since 1950*, ed. Erik Sengers (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2005), 163 - 179; S.J. Vellenga, "Tussen orthodoxie en modernisering: over fundamentalisme en de evangelische beweging in Nederland," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 48, no 2 (1994), 104-116 or W.B.H.J. van de Donk, *Geloven in het publieke domein: verkenningen van een dubbele transformatie* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

¹⁹ Cf. H. Stoffels, *Als een briesende leeuw: orthodox-Protestanten in de slag met de tijdgeest*. (Kampen: Kok, 1995), 69.

experiential in nature than Reformed churches, which is why we prefer the term 'orthodox Protestant' rather than 'evangelical', which could lead to confusion. Nevertheless, the rather exact working definition that religious scholar Pieter Boersema gives of evangelicals holds for this particular group of orthodox Protestant Christian film viewers in the Netherlands too: "A movement in Protestant circles where people feel drawn to testify in work and deed about a personal conversion in which Jesus Christ occupies a central place, for whom the Bible is the most important guidebook for their life, and for whom the work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable."²⁰ For the purpose of this study, we will follow this definition for 'orthodox Protestant viewers' too.

Since this study restricts itself to orthodox Protestant film viewers, the level of orthodoxy must in some ways be established in order to ensure that all participants fall within the above mentioned definition of orthodox Protestant believers (even if some are more orthodox than others). For a study of the Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau J.W. Becker et al. measured this level of orthodoxy by adding some questions regarding Christian beliefs to their survey (for example the belief in a life after death, the place of the Bible as Word of God, et cetera).

For this study, it is considered too complicated to add extra questions to the survey to define the exact level of orthodoxy. It is sufficient to know whether or not participants would define themselves as 'orthodox'. In the initial survey, the respondent needed to assess themselves as "hardly orthodox," "rather orthodox" and "very orthodox." In the next question, they were asked to describe "orthodox" in their own terms.²¹ Taken together, these answers were used to check whether the participant fell within the range of the working definition of orthodox Protestant film viewer. There are several reasons to choose a method of self assessment.

First, the purpose was only to check whether or not the participants could be defined as orthodox, not to measure the exact level of orthodoxy. The level of orthodoxy is not used further in the research as a variable, it is only meant to form a population for the research as opposed to non-Christian or liberal Christian viewers.

Second, the focus of this research is the religious identity, not the level of orthodoxy (as was the case with the aforementioned studies towards Christianity in the Netherlands). The focus of the self assessment question is rather to check whether the idea of orthodoxy of the respondent falls within the definition of orthodoxy by the researchers.

A third reason is related to the epistemological underpinnings of this research.²² Allowing the participants to assess themselves on their orthodoxy, falls nicely within the narrative constructionist paradigm of identity construction: the

²⁰ Boersema, "The evangelical Movement," 16.

²¹ See Appendix A5.

²² See also 1.9.

question is more whether the participants see themselves as part of Protestant orthodoxy rather than whether the exact level of orthodoxy can be objectively measured.

The fourth reason not to add questions to the questionnaire in order to measure the level of orthodoxy more precisely²³, is related to the recruitment process. The participants are all recruited from within orthodox Protestant denominations or orthodox organisations like the Evangelical Broadcasting Company or Nederlands Dagblad. It is therefore likely they are mostly – in some form or another – orthodox believers.

A last reason is practical in nature. An extra questionnaire with several questions to measure the exact level of orthodoxy would have required an extra analysis of a questionnaire and extra time for the respondents, while in all likelihood the results would have been rather similar. Much was being asked of the respondents already, by having them fill out one initial questionnaire, three questionnaires on the films and one closing questionnaire, and having three individual interviews and one focus group each on top of seeing three films together. Adding another survey only to assess their level of orthodoxy would have been unnecessarily demanding.

1.4.2 Narrative films

The second important concept is *narrative films*.²⁴ Not all films are narrative in nature – some experimental films follow a non-narrative structure. Even so, most films that are watched by a bigger audience, whether they are fiction films or documentaries, follow a narrative structure. Therefore, we restrict ourselves to narrative films in this study. In one of the standard works on film history, David Cook defines narrative film as: "A film whose structure follows a story-line of some sort. The mainstream of film history from the medium's birth through the present has been narrative."²⁵

A narrative structure means that the film has a beginning, middle and end and that the plotline exists of temporal and causal relations. It cannot simply be equated with 'fiction'. The events in a documentary are also structured by causal or temporal relations and thus have a story to tell. The difference is that documentaries have their roots directly in reality, while fiction films explore reality through situations that have no direct source in reality. In this study, we choose to screen only fiction films. The working of documentaries (and therefore the

²³ If such a measurement is possible, see the previous argument.

²⁴ We prefer the term film over movie, but in this research the two are seen as indistinguishable.

²⁵ David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*, 3rd ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996), 969.

appropriation of documentaries) is arguably different from fiction, where one is asked to identify with characters that do not exist in reality.²⁶

1.4.3 Appropriation of meaning

This study looks at the appropriation of meaning. In Ricoeurian terms: the study is mostly interested in the refiguration.²⁷ Referring to an important article on an audience response study in the field of film and religion: we look at what people actually *do* with films.²⁸

Within film studies, there is more and more focus on the reception and appropriation side of films.²⁹ A recent article on film analysis sees movies as means of communication, where both message, sender and receiver are important and thus have to be analysed accordingly: "Therefore the analysis of films should be a systematic investigation of the structures of film texts, their conditions of production and reception and the societal contexts."³⁰ A film can only mean something when a viewer watches it, its meaning does not exist as an objective, stand-alone truth.³¹

A viewer basically does two things with a film: reception (the process of understanding a film and creating a 'received text')³² and appropriation. In this study, appropriation is defined as: "the transfer of the received text into the everyday discourse of common experience and into viewers' socio-cultural praxis."³³

²⁶ For more on differences between documentaries and fiction, see David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

²⁷ This refers to Ricoeur's mimetic arc, see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and narrative I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), esp. chapter 3. More on this in 1.9 and in chapters 3 and 4.

²⁸ Marsh, "What Films Actually Do."

²⁹ This interest springs from the cultural turn in humanities, which placed film more in the field of (empirical) cultural studies rather than hermeneutical literary studies. Where film analysis in the 1970s and 1980s occurred mostly in the field of hermeneutics and humanities/language and arts departments, in recent decennias the focus was moved to cultural studies, first as semiotics but later also in audience response studies. Cf. Toby Miller and Robert Stam, *A Companion to Film Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

³⁰ Lothar Mikos, "Analysis of Film," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, ed. Uwe Flick (London [etc.]: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2014), 409.

³¹ The attentive reader will recognise a social construction paradigm behind this statement. For more on this and the relation with this study see section 1.9 and chapter 3. Important to mention here is that this is not to say that a viewer can make a film mean anything, there are some boundaries within the configuration of the film text.

³² The received text is the film as it is seen by the viewer. It is close to *fable*, a narrative construction first coined in literary theory by the Russian formalists. The existence of a 'received text' or terms like 'ideal viewer' are a matter of debate for empirical researchers. For a more thorough explanation and discussion of the matter, see chapter 3.

³³ Mikos, "Analysis of Film," 410.

The actual meaning construction (reception) will not be the central focus of research here. This process is very difficult to investigate, because it refers to a cognitive process that occurs largely unconsciously (see chapter 3). It is not our goal to build a cognitive model that explains the construction of meaning in the mind of the viewer.³⁴ Our question is strictly related to the appropriation: what will the participants do with that appropriated meaning and how does it relate to their religious identity? This is investigated by talking about the film after a few days. A process of reception and interpretation has already occurred then, so the actual process is not traced completely, but the resonance of that interpretation that has remained with the respondent (and is further elaborated by talking about the film with the interviewer and perhaps others) is what will be discussed: the appropriation.

1.4.4 Religious identity

The last key concept is religious identity. In a narrative view on religious identity we see it as a story that is told to an audience, on a particular moment in time in a certain location — in other words: religious identity is contextual in nature and cannot be researched without this context. This makes religious identity not only psychological (individual) but also inherently social and always contextual in nature. The concept of religious identity has many sides that will be more fully explored in chapter 4, but we will offer a very short working definition here. Religious identity in this research means: "The story the self tells about God to itself and others."³⁵ An important note: God refers here to what is holy, it concerns the way people relate their life story to the story of what is holy for them. It need not always be called 'God', but since the subject of this study is an orthodox Protestant population, it is very likely the respondents will identify what is holy for them as 'God'. This comment borders on a larger discussion on the topic of practical theology: should this be called God (a more ecclesial view of theology) or the holy (a seemingly more objective term that is preferred by religious scholars).³⁶ We will position ourselves in this debate in section 1.7.

³⁴ For such studies, we refer to the work of Ed Tan or Carl Plantinga. E.g. Carl R. Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). For a cognitive model in the field of film and religion see Thomas Axelson, "Movies and Meaning: Studying Audience, Fiction Film and Existential Matters," *Participations*, 5, no 1 (May 2008).

http://www.participations.org/Volume%205/Issue%201%20-%20special/5_01_axelson.htm, (accessed November 9, 2012).

³⁵ Hoover, *Religion in a Media Age*.

³⁶ See for example the Dutch publication *Spelen Met Heilig Vuur. Waarom de Theologie Haar Claim Op de Waarheid Moet Opgeven* by theologian Ruard Ganzevoort and the discussion that followed amongst Dutch theologians.

1.5 Participants

Most empirical studies in the field of film and theology are done with common film viewers who may or may not have a institutional religious background.³⁷ While that research is certainly very important and it would be worthwhile to conduct similar studies among Dutch cinemagoers or film viewers, the particular focus of this research is on the particular functions of film for orthodox Protestant viewers.

The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, there is an academic interest. There is very little known of the role film plays in the spiritual lives of believers (or other popular culture segments). We already mentioned that the role of the church is rapidly changing and it seems logical to assume that this has its consequences for how Christians choose, interpret and use the films they watch. Compared to regular viewers there are a few interesting extra factors that come into play: how do Christians deal with films that present ethical and spiritual challenges? Is there any influence from the films that are watched on how they experience their faith? Research into these kind of questions demands a whole different design, but what we wanted to explore is a first idea of how orthodox Protestant film viewers deal with and appropriate films³⁸ and what can be said on the mutual interplay between film viewing and religious identity.

Secondly, there is the personal interest and background of the researcher, who works as a practical theologian from the same background as the participants in this study and has a large interest in the use of film in spiritual and religious contexts. In a changing context the role of popular culture for the church needs to be explored, especially when it is known from previous research among non-believers and agnostics that this role is potentially very important. Contrary to a religious study scholar or positivist behavioural science scholar, we do not believe that this personal background should be objectified or minimised. As practical theologians we are both part of and *Gegenüber* for the church, as people but also as scholars. In qualitative research this is not seen as an impossibility.³⁹

³⁷ Most noteworthy are the studies of Wilhelm Gräb in Germany, cf. Gräb, "Irgendwie fühl ich mich"; the studies of Clive Marsh and Charlotte Haines Lyon, cf. "Film's Role in Contemporary Meaning-Making. A Theological Challenge to Cultural Studies" in *Reconfigurations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Religion in a Post-Secular Society*, ed. S. Knauss & A. Darius Ornella, (Vienna: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 2007), 113-125; and the work of Stewart Hoover and his team in the USA, cf. Hoover, *Religion in a Media Age*.

³⁸ The influence of films (and other forms of popular culture) on viewers is a hotly debated topic since the Payne Studies in the 1920s. Methodologically it is difficult to pinpoint direct influences. It is clear that the cultural background and cognitive capabilities of the viewer are very important and that the paradigm of passive viewer theories, that assume a direct and unfiltered influence, is passé. For a more detailed discussion, see chapters 2 and 3.

³⁹ See also the next section and 1.9.

1.6 *Film and theology or film and religion?*

In the introduction we already mentioned the difference between the terms 'film and theology' and 'film and religion'. This distinction relates to the discussion between theologians and religious studies scholars about what the topic of research can be in a scientific paradigm. In religious studies, religion is researched from an outsider's perspective, using methods from the social sciences or anthropology. The same can be said of theology though, particularly in practical theology where empirical research has become popular. The focus on empirical methods is therefore not the main distinction between the two. (To illustrate the topic it may be useful to repeat film and religion scholar Melanie Wright in quoting Brian Bocking: "if you don't know the difference, you're a theologian."⁴⁰)

One key difference between religious studies and theology is the perspective: where religious studies principally chooses an outsider's perspective, theology usually allows an insider's perspective.⁴¹ Another difference is that a religious studies scholar will usually avoid normative statements, while a theologian actively seeks the normative dimension. Some theologians focus on the uniqueness of particular situations as opposed to a tendency in religious studies to seek for generalisation and a more quantitative — some say: objectified — approach (although some theologians use quantitative methods and statistics too).

Underlying the main distinctions is a difference in meta-theoretical perspective: 'classic' religious studies scholars follow the positivist behavioural and objective preferences in social sciences, such as quantitative methods, emphasis on reliability and validity (especially the repeatability and generalisation of results) and statistical approaches whereas many theologians prefer a social construction paradigm where the subjectivity of any researcher is not problematised but taken into account in the research design.⁴²

The distinction between film and religion or film and theology is mainly related to this distinction in religious studies and theology. Most theologians prefer the term film and theology and religious scholars use the term film and religion, so it may seem straightforward to choose the preferred name of film and theology for the present study. The main reason for preferring film and theology is not only because it is a study in practical theology, but mostly because the metatheoretical

⁴⁰ Wright, *Religion and Film*.

⁴¹ For a good discussion (in Dutch) see Pieter Boersema and Stefan Paas, eds., *Onder Spanning: Een Veelzijdige Kijk Op Veranderingen in Kerk En Samenleving* (Utrecht: Uitgeverij Kok, 2011).

⁴² Even though theology and religious studies are distinctive disciplines the two fields seem to grow closer together, so that the described differences may not count for all theologians and all religious studies scholars. The discussion will be a continuing one. See also Boersema and Paas, *Onder Spanning*.

perspective behind the research is much closer to that of theology than it is to religious studies.⁴³

The present study relates to film and religion in one important aspect because it looks for ways in which films function religiously for film viewers. It is mostly – though not exclusively – religious studies scholars that see film as another form of religion rather than theologians (but this is changing, see chapter 2).⁴⁴ More about the central topic in theology and religious studies will be said in 1.7. In conclusion of this section: we prefer the term film and theology but it will not be used exclusively.

1.7 Practical Theology

In the last few decades, many practical theologians refer to a crisis in the field. In an era of secularisation and deinstitutionalisation, practical theology is faced with the threat of becoming irrelevant. A large reason for this is that for a long time, it was not exactly clear what practical theology was.⁴⁵ Not even its place among the theological encyclopaedia was clear, let alone its place at modern day's university.⁴⁶ Recently, the discipline has seemed to find a new élan as a discipline

⁴³ See 1.9 for a more thorough argumentation.

⁴⁴ Though we would not go as far as to say that film is another religion, we do acknowledge that film is an important source for meaning-making and can have a large role in one's religious identity, so film can function religiously.

⁴⁵ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 16, no. 1 (January 2012). This also relates to a debate about the character of theology: is it first and foremost a philosophical, speculative discipline (e.g. the view of Thomas of Aquino) or is it in essence a practical discipline (e.g. Duns Scotus' view). This topic will be discussed further in chapter 8. For a historical overview of the debate see J. A. van der Ven, *God Reinvented?: A Theological Search in Texts and Tables*, Empirical Studies in Theology, v. 1 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 1998), 29-33.

⁴⁶ Perhaps at this point it is wise to clarify our view on the position of practical theology within the theological encyclopaedia, although it is a debate that will not be solved in the limited scope of this research. We see practical theology mostly as a practical discipline that has 'the living human document', i.e. praxis, as its primary *locus*. However, especially in the normative task (see section 1.9) practical theology engages in a dialogue with the other disciplines in theology, such as systematic or biblical theology. Rather than opposing systematic theology and practical theology we see it as two distinct but supplementary disciplines within the theological encyclopaedia. Since this is a practical theological study, this discipline is primary. That inevitably means that the theological reflection (Reel IV in this study) may fall short of a purely systematic view but this is a direct consequence of our positioning within the field of practical theology. More on this in chapter 8.

that focuses on the relationship between tradition and practice and between society and church. A focus on 'lived religion' has become central.⁴⁷

The largest debate within practical theology at this time is whether the discipline should follow an ecclesial paradigm (also referred to as a clerical paradigm), with a focus on the praxis of and in the church or a more public paradigm, focusing on 'lived religion' and the relation with society and culture.⁴⁸

For some theologians, the work field and main focus of practical theology should always be the transforming action of God within the church (ecclesial/clerical paradigm), for others theology is only relevant if it concerns the wider society (public paradigm). Other theologians are focused more on theology as the study of 'lived religion', wherever this is to be found.⁴⁹ All believe that theology should be inherently normative and critical, but differ in the direction of this critique.

This study takes a middle position between the two poles of a continuum between an ecclesial paradigm and a public paradigm. We will use the first for a focus of practical theology on the practices of the church and the latter for a focus on the relevance of (practical) theology in society.⁵⁰ In our view, both paradigms can have significant value for theology in the 21st century. The aim of this study is to build a bridge between the sometimes too separate areas of church and culture, but as a study within orthodox Protestant churches, its relevance will be largely within the Christian community.⁵¹ In that sense it differs from other studies towards film and theology such as the aforementioned studies of Marsh and Hoover, who targeted film viewers in general. The reason for this lies in our personal interest, since we believe that film (and culture in general) can be a

⁴⁷ This refers to praxis both within and outside of the church. In pastoral theology, even though many different methods are possible, the hermeneutical focus is on "the living human document" after Boisson's famous phrase, used by Charles Gerkin for his theory on pastoral care. Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).

⁴⁸ For a historical overview see Van der Ven, *God Reinvented?*, 33-40 who distinguishes between a pastoral, ecclesial and public orientation in practical theology. We prefer the term 'ecclesial paradigm' because this allows for a larger scope for practical theology beyond mere education of the clergy (a confusing connotation that might occur with the phrase 'clerical paradigm') while it still clearly refers to practical theology as a discipline that studies the praxis of and in the church.

⁴⁹ Cf. R. Ruud Ganzevoort, "Forks in the Road When Tracing the Sacred. Practical Theology as Hermeneutics of Lived Religion," (presented at the 9th Conference of International Academy of Practical Theology, Chicago, 2009).

⁵⁰ Both paradigms focus on praxis, but one is more concerned with the practices of and in the church and the other with 'new' forms of religion.

⁵¹ Although there is an academic relevance for the field of film studies too, as is explained above.

valuable tool for church leadership and the theological academy to help believers develop their faith within their daily lives (Miller-McLemores first and fourth use of theology). The focus is therefore necessarily on the insider's position. This is not to say that the results cannot be used outside the church or that theology should always be focused on the church. It is simply the most logical choice for this particular research in this particular context.

1.8 Film Studies

Since cinema is only a bit over a century old, it is not surprising that film studies as a separate discipline is a relatively young branch on the academic tree. The golden age of film theory was from the seventies to the nineties, when the paradigms of structuralism and semiotics reigned supreme. Films were seen as texts, with its own grammatical system that could be studied meticulously in order to arrive at the meaning of a film.

Since the bulk of cinema is formed by narrative films, it is not surprising that narrative theory has had a lot of impact on film studies. This was often combined with semiotics and psychoanalytics. In terms of Ricoeur's theory of mimesis: the configuration was central, in combination with the refiguration (the reception and appropriation of the viewer). The prefiguration does matter in terms of conventions that are familiar for both the filmmakers and the viewers, but it cannot be said that film is about the message that filmmakers deliberately put in a film.⁵²

Recently however, the text-based approaches of semiotics and psychoanalytics are deemed irrelevant because they have hardly any bearing on how actual viewers look at films or how they handle films within their everyday lives.⁵³ Following the work of the Birmingham School, many film scholars started to do audience response studies, rather than structuralist film analysis, although this still exists as well.⁵⁴

The culturalist turn, as it is often called, has led to a greater attention for audience research since the late nineties, because the way people deal with cultural artefacts is relatively easy to study empirically. This has occurred both in 'mainstream' film studies as in the field of film and religion. In many universities, the academic discipline of 'pure' film studies has been under pressure. Many see a

⁵² Which is rather important in the context of a film and theology research, since many Christian film viewers and writers on film seem to believe that such a message exist, see Mitchell, "Theology and Film."

⁵³ See for example Toby Miller, "Cinema studies doesn't matter, or I know what you did last semester," in *Keyframes: popular cinema and cultural studies*, ed. Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejo, (London/New York: Routledge, 2001), 303-309.

⁵⁴ Marsh, "What Films Actually Do."

combination of cultural studies and film studies as the best way for film studies to progress⁵⁵ — a position with which we agree. Moreover, we locate ourselves in the field of audience response studies. Interesting though the individual interpretations of *Des Hommes et des Dieux*, *Mar Adentro* and *Blue Like Jazz* may be, in the context of this research we focus on their reception and appropriation by our film audience.

The focus of cultural studies on the three areas of production, text and reception fits nicely into the narrative framework of this study.⁵⁶ Ricoeur distinguished three moments in his famous "mimetic arc": prefiguration (the world behind a text), configuration (the world of the text) and refiguration (the world in front of the text). Meaning happens in between these three dimensions.⁵⁷ For this study we will look mostly to the refiguration and assess how people interpret the film rather than the construction of the text itself (configuration) or the intentions of the filmmakers (prefiguration).

1.9 Metatheoretical perspective

In this section, Osmer's model of practical theological research is used to explain its metatheoretical perspectives (see figure 1). Richard Osmer explores two levels of doing research: the reflective practice, which functions on the level of ecclesial and pastoral practice, and the metatheoretical perspective from which this reflective practice is done.⁵⁸ The metatheoretical perspective guides the research and determines much of the methodology.

Osmer's model is instructive, because it provides a multi-layered view of conducting research. The research problem in this study (the relation between appropriation of the meaning of films and religious identity) is the focus of the bottom part of the model.⁵⁹ In the descriptive/empirical phase, we study the way participants talk about their identity and the films they were shown.⁶⁰ In the interpretive phase, we use a theoretical framework to explain how these processes

⁵⁵ Cf. Wright, *Religion and Film* or in the Dutch context: Freek L Bakker, *Jezus in beeld: een studie naar zijn verschijnen op het witte doek* (Utrecht: Van Gruting, 2011).

⁵⁶ See also Joel Friso and R. Ruud Ganzevoort, "Zin in Het Donker. Over Het Werken Met Film in Vormingswerk," *Handelingen. Tijdschrift Voor Praktische Theologie.*, no. 36/5 (2009): 44–53, Ganzevoort *De hand van God* and Bakker, *Jezus in Beeld* who made similar connections.

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative I*. See next section for a full discussion.

⁵⁸ Richard R. Osmer, "Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67, no. 2 (November 2011): #Art. 1058, 7 pages, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i2.1058>.

⁵⁹ Osmer explained this part of the model in his introduction on practical theology: Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008).

⁶⁰ See Reel III, chapters 5-7.

work and what their relationship entails.⁶¹ The normative phase is the theological reflection, both before and after the descriptive/empirical phase.⁶² In the pragmatic phase, the findings are discussed and a possible way to respond theologically is sketched.

The point of Osmer's model is that this entire study is conducted from a certain perspective — the upper dimension of the model. Each of the research phases are determined by certain metatheoretical choices, which in qualitative research must be explicitly addressed. Osmer identifies four metatheoretical issues: the theory-praxis relationship, models of cross-disciplinary work, sources of justification, and the theological rationale.⁶³ The theory-praxis relationship refers to choices regarding the relationship between theory and praxis or the way one looks at the world and gets to know it. Cross-disciplinary models give some necessary guidance and clarity in relating different disciplines to each other. It also refers to the choices that are made for dialogue partners. Sources of justification are about the way the researcher balances the traditional sources of theological truth: Scripture, tradition, reason and experience (cf. Wesley's quadrilateral). The theological rationale refers to the personal convictions of the researcher, since these will guide her research in important ways.⁶⁴ In this section, all of these metatheoretical choices will be discussed, structured along the lines of Osmer's model.

⁶¹ See Reel II, chapters 3-4.

⁶² In other words, theological reflections guide the research as much as the research guides the theological reflection. The theological reflections on the outcome of the study are found in Reel IV, chapter 8.

⁶³ Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

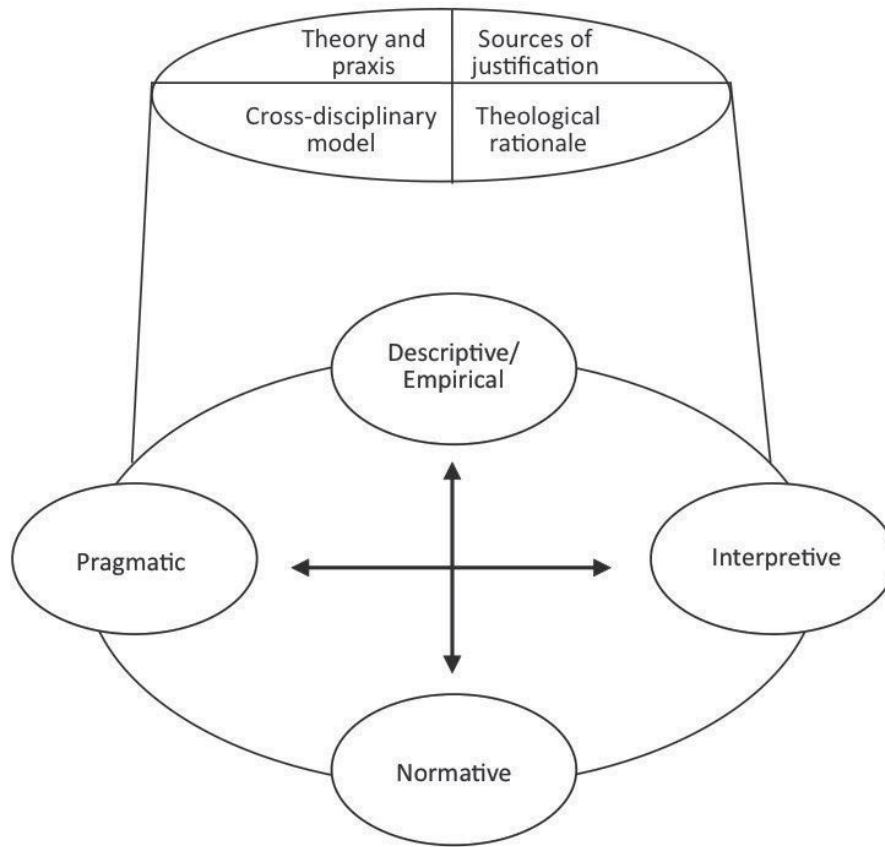


Figure 1 Metatheoretical issues in practical theology⁶⁵

1.9.1 *Theory and praxis*

The present study is hermeneutical and empirical in nature.⁶⁶ In this study the relation between theory and praxis is seen from a social constructionist paradigm. This entails that our knowledge of the world does not depend on some objectively obtained knowledge, but on the way we approach it, on discourse and the social relations that guide that approach.⁶⁷

In short, social construction assumes that the way we understand the world is not a requirement of 'what there is' but the outcome of social relationships and thoroughly dependent on language. An important point to make is that social constructionism has both a radical and a moderate vision on "truth."⁶⁸ Only radical social constructionism argues that there is no truth at all. A more moderate viewpoint is that social constructionism does not necessarily argue that there *is* no

⁶⁵ Osmer, "Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective," 3.

⁶⁶ In Osmer's classification, it would fall between the American hermeneutical approach, based on Charles Gerkin, and the empirical approach. Cf. Osmer, "Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective," 3.

⁶⁷ Kenneth J. Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, 2nd ed (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009).

⁶⁸ For this point see also John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006).

truth — it merely says that the way we *understand* truth is thoroughly dependent on social constructions. Social constructions have their value only in certain language games (cf. Wittgenstein), not in general. See for example spiritual language: this will work in a church where everyone shares the same premise, but is incomprehensible in an atheist environment.

In a narrative approach, one's identity is not a static, factual given but a story that is told to a specific audience in always changing circumstances. It therefore falls within the paradigm of social construction. In the context of this study: the interviews that are held with the respondents, depend to a large extent on the relationship between the researchers and the participant. The life stories that are the result of the interviews are a one time event, not an objective, non-changing truth. This means that the stories could have been different — and will be different — in another time and context. This is a direct result from the chosen research paradigm and does not mean that the research is unreliable or invalid.⁶⁹

The choice for a narrative perspective in this study and a hermeneutical view on identity is valid because it fits the purpose of research and the nature of the study. Film is in itself a narrative form of culture and it seems safe to assume that at least part of its impact on the reader has to do with its narrative character (we will discuss this further in chapter 3). The connection between a narrative perspective and media studies (of which the study of film and theology is a part) has proven to be viable in the past. Stewart Hoover, for example, looks at the connection between "narratives of the self" and the use of media.⁷⁰

The narrative perspective and the social construction paradigm have also worked well for the field of practical theology. First of all, it is clear that theology's study object largely consists of stories. Furthermore, practical theology in itself aims not for general conclusions or objective truth, but develops particular understandings of individuals in their 'lived religion' and (normative) action theories to guide that understanding.⁷¹

In the history of theology and religious studies therefore, many have taken the narrative turn in very different ways.⁷² Narrative research reminds us that humans live their lives by telling stories, that reflect upon life and help to act

⁶⁹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. For more on validation, see 5.2.3.

⁷⁰ Hoover, *Religion in a Media Age*.

⁷¹ For more on practical theology and social construction, see C.A.M. Hermans, ed., *Social Constructionism and Theology*, Empirical Studies in Theology, v. 7. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002).

⁷² See for example the very different works of biblical scholar Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative; a Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); the ethics of Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981); or the pastoral studies of Gerkin, *The Living Human Document*, even though they all use narrative theory as a guiding concept.

appropriately to the circumstances. These stories are set against the religious stories of the tradition, that offer ways of looking into the world, alternatives, rituals, et cetera.⁷³

The content of research needs not necessarily be narrative in form in order to work from a narrative paradigm. Taking a narrative perspective is also possible when the content itself is not narrative in nature. Since Stephen Crites wrote his seminal article "The Narrative Quality of Experience"⁷⁴, it has become possible to research 'life' and 'identity' as if they were stories. The main idea of this approach is that we *understand* life as if it were a story, even if we live it day by day. The same goes for identity (we understand ourselves through our life-story) or verbal non-narrative forms as creeds or liturgies.⁷⁵ This study thus views identity from a narrative perspective, even if most of its material (such as the interviews on the participants' interpretations of the films) is not.

It is very important to understand that we are talking in epistemological terms here. It is not to say that our life *is* a story, but that we *understand* it as a story. We give meaning to our lives by constructing a narrative of who we are. A narrative perspective is hermeneutical: it is all about the interpretation. This goes for the construction of identity by the participant (he or she interprets certain events by waving it into a story) but also for the researcher, who interprets the already interpreted identity. For a narrative researcher, it means that we take the story that is told to us seriously in itself, and that we do not try to make it a 'constant', non-changing truth.

In practical theological research from a narrative perspective, the work of Paul Ricoeur forms a landmark. For building the theoretical framework, we rely on his narrative view of the self. Ricoeur explains how one's identity is built by weaving the events of one's life into the web of one's life story — a performance that needs to happen again and again, in ever changing forms.⁷⁶ His view of the representation of external reality, or mimesis, gives us a good description of how to understand our life and world in narrative ways.⁷⁷ Ricoeur distinguished three moments in the relation between narrative and reality: mimesis₁, or prefiguration.

⁷³ Cf. Ganzevoort, "Religious Stories We Live By."

⁷⁴ Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (1971), 291–311.

⁷⁵ Cf. A. Léon van Ommen, *Suffering in Worship: Anglican Liturgy in Relation to Stories of Suffering People* (Farnham: Ashgate, forthcoming). For a narrative perspective on identity research the work of Paul Ricoeur has been seminal, see below.

⁷⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen MacLaughlin, and David Pellauer, *Time and Narrative III* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁷⁷ See his *Time and Narrative I-III*.

This is the world 'behind' the text, the context, background, culture of the narrator. Second is mimesis₂, or the configuration. This is the text itself, the carefully interwoven elements that create the sense of meaning (whether this is a story, a film or an identity). Last is the mimesis₃, or refiguration, the world in front of the text. This is the context of the reader, "a possible world for the reader to live in, inviting her or him to respond."⁷⁸ Meaning happens in between these three dimensions. As stated before, for this study we will look mostly at the refiguration.

Building on his view of mimesis, Ricoeur argued for a hermeneutical view on identity rather than a Cartesian view.⁷⁹ In other words, Ricoeur sees identity as an interpretational affair. For him, the self is not an independent entity as the ego was for Descartes, for example. A narrative identity is a personal construction of the subject, who interprets the various events in his or her life to construct a coherent whole. This interpretation happens again and again, in different circumstances. New events are integrated as they happen, leading to a new life story which sheds new light on the self. In the terms of mimesis: new circumstances (preconfiguration) are interpreted and integrated in the configuration, leading to a different view on reality in the reconfiguration.

Ruard Ganzevoort applied Ricoeur's model on the production, film text and reception of films, which leads to a workable model to understand the focus of our research model.⁸⁰ This threefold mimesis of prefiguration, configuration and refiguration also fits well within the paradigm of cultural studies, since it pays attention to the function of the film for the viewer, the working of the film text itself and the circumstances in which the film is made. It is the assumption of this thesis that this theory can explain well how films can make an impression on viewers, and how viewers can say that seeing this or that film was 'a life changing' event.⁸¹

1.9.2 Cross-disciplinary models

A study in the field of film and theology is inherently interdisciplinary: it involves both film studies and theology. Although the term 'interdisciplinary' is used quite often, the exact meaning is not always clear.⁸² The difference between inter- and intradisciplinarity is the level of integration: in interdisciplinary theology the separate disciplines have equal weight but always stay separate, in intradisciplinary theology, the two are intertwined. Theology itself becomes empirical: "that is, that it expand[s] its traditional range of procedures, consisting of literary-historical and systematic methods and techniques, in the direction of an

⁷⁸ Ganzevoort, "Religious Stories We Live By," 3.

⁷⁹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*.

⁸⁰ Ganzevoort, *De hand van God* and Friso and Ganzevoort, "Zin in Het Donker."

⁸¹ The theoretical framework is explained in more detail in chapters 3 and 4.

⁸² See Van der Ven, *God Reinvented*, who distinguishes between mono-, multi-, inter- and intradisciplinarity.

empirical methodology."⁸³ Intradisciplinary theology is thus a form of theology that borrows concepts, methods and techniques of one science (for example social studies) and integrates this with itself. The religious identity of the research participants is researched from such an intradisciplinary theology.

The study is also multidisciplinary however, in the way it balances film studies and theology in the theological reflection (Reel IV). Multidisciplinary studies involve balancing different theories and different variables. The way these relate to each other should be clear, appropriate and balanced for both (or more) disciplines. The metatheoretical perspective must fit the different disciplines, which we have argued above for narrative research into film and religion/theology. Film studies is used to explain how film viewers establish and appropriate meaning in films, after which a practical theological reflection (hermeneutical-empirical in nature)⁸⁴ is given. The main discipline is practical theology. The theoretical framework itself will be explained in Reel II of this study.

1.9.3 Sources of justification

Osmer also requires metatheoretical reflection on the balance between the traditional sources of theological truth as expressed in Wesley's quadrilateral: Scripture, tradition, reason and experience.⁸⁵ In an empirical study, experience and reason play an important part, but as practical theologians, we want to bring in Scripture and tradition as well — otherwise, it would be a study from a religious studies perspective.

Many theologians have problems with an inherently empirical theology because they fear that theology will merely become a 'handmaid' of the social sciences.⁸⁶ We will use Swinton and Mowats revised model of mutual critical correlation to explain how that can be avoided. Building on Tillich's famous model of correlation, the mutual critical correlation model "is a model of integration which seeks to bring these dimensions [theology and other sources of knowledge] together in a way which respects and gives an equal voice to each dialogue partner."⁸⁷

In this revised model of correlation, the correlation goes both ways. Both theology and the dialogue partner may provide questions and answers regarding a

⁸³ Ibid., 49.

⁸⁴ Van der Ven specifically argues for the term 'hermeneutical-empirical' to overcome the positivist and objectivist nature of 'pure' empiricism. Van der Ven, *God Reinvented*, 50.

⁸⁵ Much has been written on the use of the quadrilateral in current (evangelical) theology and the relation between the four sources. See e.g. Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of evangelical Theology* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 1990).

⁸⁶ Cf. Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 77.

certain topic: "Within the model of mutual critical correlation, the data acquired from qualitative research has an equal voice within the conversation and can challenge theology and tradition in exactly the same way as theology and tradition can challenge its findings."⁸⁸

A practical theologian studies a specific situation (in this case the film viewing practices of Christian viewers) by using theoretical insights and methodology provided by another discipline from the social sciences (in this case film studies, more specifically audience response studies). (S)he then answers these findings with insights from the other theological disciplines and tradition.⁸⁹ These findings combined provide a prophetic answer to the specific situation, changing church practices and interpretation of tradition if need be.

At the same time, Swinton and Mowat clearly establish the role of Scripture and maintain that theology also has a logical priority: theological insights may use data from qualitative research, but it does not acquire its ultimate significance from it. On the other hand, the research data does need theological insight in order to be fully understood.⁹⁰

Swinton and Mowat's revised model of mutual critical correlation adds some cross-disciplinary rigour to Osmer's model of reflective practice. It stresses the distinct role of qualitative research methods in the social sciences and theology's reflection on the data that are acquired by it. It explains why, from a practical theological viewpoint, the normative and pragmatic dimensions of the research are pivotal. It also shows how in a particular practical theological study all four sources of theology in the Wesleyan quadrilateral can have their place.

1.9.4 Theological rationale

Osmer argues that the way particular situations are assessed or the way particular research projects are designed, depends largely on the theological rationale of the researcher. By framing this particular research project in practical theology and not in religious studies, this study reflects its own theological rationale. Two subjects must be reflected on here: the choice for a social constructionist paradigm and the position between public and ecclesial practical theology.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁹ Throughout the study, we prefer gender-inclusive or neutral pronouns such as (s)he or they, but because of readability this will not be used consistently. Whenever he or him is used in a general sense, one can read she or her and vice versa.

⁹⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 84-85. Swinton and Mowat do so by using pastoral theologian Van Deusen Hunsinger's Christological perspective on mutual critical correlation. See Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995).

At first sight, the choice for a social constructionist paradigm and the choice to uphold Scripture as a main source of justification seem to clash. Does not social construction argue that there is no objective truth? How does this relate to Christ's claim to be "the way, the truth and the life" in John 14:6? It is important to remember here, that the social constructionist paradigm speaks in epistemological terms, as we argued above: the way we understand the world is not required by 'what there is'. It does not speak in ontological terms to argue there is no such thing as truth (although the more radical social constructionists might argue that). It rather says our view of the truth is always fragmented and temporal (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12).

These two paradigms thus do not necessarily contradict each other, but have their own roles to play. Even if, for the sake of this research project, we assess our data as if they are fully contextual and bound to the research design and other methodological choices, this is not to say that we do not share some of the participants views on truth and the sacred. It is simply to say that we can only come to *know* this truth, and research it, in a contextual way.

There is also another theological justification behind this choice for a contextual view on research and the choice for a theology of lived religion. This theological rationale is expressed by Henning Luther, who argues that since practical theology focuses on the individual, the contextual nature of research is warranted. Our research participants are subjects that are seen by God and are worthy of theological reflection and, as image-bearers of God, they deserve not to be reduced to statistical models.⁹¹

The choice between public and ecclesial theology is also dependent on our theological rationale. This study positions itself on the middle of a pole between a public and ecclesial theology. Together with our participants we share the belief in the revelatory nature of theology. At the same time, we thoroughly believe in the revelatory nature of experience and reason as well – we want to be relevant beyond the church in showing that film viewing may form a spiritual source that is important for any religious identity, not only for those within the church. The way the research is conducted, is thus largely dependent on the metatheoretical issues that were explained in this section. In the following sections, we will briefly discuss the design of the study and give an overview of the rest of the study.

1.10 Design and methods

The study is designed in line with other studies done in the field of film and religion/(practical) theology.⁹² It was a qualitative study with thirty participants.

⁹¹ Henning Luther, *Religion Und Alltag: Bausteine Zu Einer Praktischen Theologie Des Subjekts*, Radius Bücher (Stuttgart: Radius-Verlag, 1992).

⁹² We focused mostly on Gräb, "Irgendwie fühl ich mich" and the studies of Clive Marsh and Charlotte Haines Lyon, cf. "Film's Role in Contemporary Meaning-Making." From a

These respondents viewed three carefully selected films together at the location of the Christian University of Applied Sciences in Ede (ECU).⁹³ Before the first film, they had an interview on their religious identity and after each film they had a personal interview after a few days or a focus group discussion directly after the screening (two personal interviews and one focus group for each participant).⁹⁴ The data were enriched by a survey on their film habits and some personal variables (before the study started) and a survey on how they had experienced their participation (afterwards). By choosing for this form of methodological triangulation, we traced the interpretation and appropriation process as closely as possible from various angles.⁹⁵

1.11 Study overview

The study is divided in four parts (Reel 1 - 4) with different chapters (Scene 1 - 8). The first reel forms the introduction. After the present chapter follows the *status quaestionis* in chapter 2, where a historical overview of the field of film and theology is offered as well as a positioning of this study within that field.

Reel 2, the theoretical framework, is discussed in chapters 3 (the appropriation of meaning in film) and 4 (the construction of religious identity). Chapter 3 focuses on the hermeneutical arc and discusses the pro-filmic theory of Martin Barker. In chapter 4 various theories underlying the concept of religious identity statuses – which emerged from the data as a useful lens to analyse the interviews with – are discussed.

The third reel describes the empirical study itself. The methodology of the study is discussed in wider detail in chapter 5. The findings are discussed in chapter 6 (results) and 7 (conclusions). This reel explains how the different ways of appropriating the meaning of films are related to the religious identity statuses. The last reel consists of a theological evaluation of the findings and a discussion of the limitations and recommendations for further research (chapter 8). In this final chapter, some contours for a dramatic theology that can incorporate the outcomes of the empirical study are sketched.

religious studies perspective, see the work of Stewart Hoover and his team in the USA in *Religion in a Media Age*. For a detailed description of the methodology and a reflection on the methodological choices, see chapter 5.

⁹³ The films that were screened were *Mar Adentro*, *Des hommes et des dieux* and *Blue like jazz*. For more on the selection and the films, see chapter 5.

⁹⁴ For more on the particulars, see chapter 5.

⁹⁵ For a detailed overview of the method and more information on triangulation and an argumentation of this particular method, see chapter 5.

